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SYMPOSIUM

Mobilities and Mobilizations of the Urban Poor

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Abstract

This introduction sets out the aims of the symposium on mobilities and mobilizations of the urban poor. Exploring the physical, social and imagined movements of the poor into, within and out of cities, and addressing how these movements connect to the dynamics of urban social mobilization, it argues for an incorporation of the 'mobility turn' in studies of the urban poor. The introduction proposes a number of relevant themes within this approach, starting with increased attention to the interconnections between physical and imaginative movements. This is followed by a discussion of representations of mobility and mobile representations: the ways in which physical movement, place and urban poverty are represented, and the increased transnational mobility of these representations. Next, a focus on differential mobilities is used to analyze how mobility differences within or between social groups are (re)produced in local power constellations. In addition, the relation between mobilities and public–private divides is examined, especially in terms of physical and imaginative place-making. A final emphasis is on academic mobilities, with the authors arguing for reflexive attention to the position of those who research the urban poor and the specific practices of mobility associated with this research.

This symposium explores the physical, social and imagined movements of the poor into, within and out of cities and addresses how these movements connect to the dynamics of urban social mobilization. The six articles presented here are the product of an international conference organized in September 2009 in Leiden, the Netherlands, in honor of the retiring urban anthropologist Peter J.M. Nas. The conference brought to light a number of cross-cultural insights that have been further elaborated for this symposium. The authors study the ways in which urban space is imagined and how this connects to the spatialization of the networks of the urban poor, both within and beyond cities. The contributors analyze instances when the urban poor coalesce to become visible, as well as when they strategically remain invisible, in both a physical and a symbolic sense. The articles start from the idea that, in a globalized world, virtual forms of travel and alliance can supplement or even replace physical movement.

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Following Cresswell (2010: 19), we understand mobilities here as the entanglement of three aspects: 'the fact of physical movement — getting from one place to another; the representations of movement that give it shared meaning; and, finally, the experienced and embodied practice of movement'. Physical movement can be taken as the 'raw material' from which mobilities are produced. A mobilities approach to migration, for instance, entails not only a study of the physical movement of people between and across places, but also entails considering the popular and official representations of these movements and the embodied practices involved. Virtual movement refers to the forms of communication, alliance and exchange enabled through the circulation of images and information. We see mobilization as the process, central to the formation of political actors, of making resources (such as manpower, money, information or images) available for the collective making of claims (Tilly and Tarrow, 2006: 74). By analyzing the flows, networks and imaginaries that influence possibilities for physical movement and social mobilization across and beyond the city, this symposium aims to share some fresh theoretical insights on the relationship between im/mobility and urban poverty. The rapid growth of the world's urban population over the past decades has spurred social scientists to define the specificities of urban poverty and the urban poor, especially in so-called developing countries. The literatures on urban poverty have long been separate, with sociology studying poverty in North American and European cities, and development studies focusing on cities in the global South. Notwithstanding the large disparity between the global North and the global South, the urban poor share many features across borders, both in terms of the challenges they face and the strategies they develop to address them. This symposium argues for an approach that bridges this disciplinary and geographical divide.

While urban and rural poverty are often interrelated, there are important differences between urban and rural settings that must be taken into account when studying the urban poor: 'Reviewing what is specifically urban about poor people living in cities reveals a number of facts that are salient to understanding the challenges facing the urban poor and the means to address these challenges' (Fay, 2005: 1). Contemporary cities are, more than ever, heterogeneous, in flux and heavily integrated into a global market economy. The urban poor function in complex socioeconomic settings, often marked by high levels of segregation and social exclusion. They pursue livelihoods within monetized economies, in which formal and informal sectors are closely intertwined and where social networks are arguably less stable than in rural areas, while rates of crime and insecurity tend to be higher (Fay, 2005; Knox and McCarthy, 2005). In cities worldwide, the urban poor act individually and collectively in attempts to overcome not only economic deprivation, but also the obstacles posed by lack of social recognition and self-determination. We argue in this symposium that attention to the mobilities of the urban poor — their physical movements as well as the associated representations and practices — will enable a better understanding of mobilization towards collective claim-making as well as individual attempts to achieve social mobility.

For many people across the world, moving into the city from rural areas or smaller towns is a first step in achieving social mobility. This enabling function of cities and the role of urban space in social differentiation and inequality have been a more or less constant research focus, from early Chicago School studies of urbanization to the rural–urban migration boom of the 1960s to today's era of global migration. In comparison to earlier studies of rapid urbanization, two important shifts have occurred that need to be taken into account. First, rural–urban migration is no longer the most significant cause of numeric increases of the urban poor; rather, demographic growth of the urban poor and endogenous processes affecting the distribution of resources and opportunities are more important explanatory factors. Second, livelihood opportunities in cities have become increasingly dependent on global networks and flows. The notion of 'globalization from below' (Appadurai, 1996; 2000) and the emergence of a mobility paradigm in the social sciences (Hannam *et al.*, 2006; Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007) have smoothed the way for empirical research on the ways in which the urban poor

participate in globalization. The mass migration of past decades has allowed many disadvantaged urbanites to move across the globe in search of a better life, most often to other cities, while maintaining connections to the places they have left behind. Ironically, it often proves easier for the urban poor to achieve transnational mobility and maintain transnational networks than to bridge entrenched sociospatial divides within their city of origin. Global flows and networks allow us to 'affiliate in ways that bring us closer to someone around the globe than to our next-door neighbour' (Smart and Smart, 2003: 267). The mobilities and mobilizations of the urban poor, viewed from a 'grassroots' perspective, have become core themes within urban anthropology. The relevance of exploring the mobilities and mobilizations of the urban poor as presented in this symposium stems from a need to understand more fully the connections between global flows and local sociospatial development in cities across the globe.

The articles cover a wide range of case studies in urban areas ranging from North America and Europe to Asia and Latin America. Analytically, they understand the urban poor as individual and collective agents who are capable of mobilizing people, resources and representations in various ways, across varying geographical distances. The groups the authors focus on include homeless youth, tsunami victims, producers and consumers of 'ghetto' culture, informal garbage collectors, neighborhood activists and residents involved in the auto-construction of homes. The articles describe how these groups engage in a broad variety of transnational flows, collaborate with other groups, renegotiate social positions through a range of material and symbolic tactics, sometimes raising their voices in protest, always aspiring to get ahead in life. The personal experiences, livelihood strategies and aspirations of the urban poor to 'move on', literally and figuratively, are shaped by the obstacles and opportunities posed by cities and supra-local networks. These analyses of their various ways of spatializing culture, negotiating representation and producing and contesting social stratification shed an ethnographic light on the city as both medium and outcome of poor urban residents in motion.

Physical and imaginative movements of the urban poor

Theorists of mobilities have called for increased attention to the interconnections between real and imaginative movements. In which ways is physical movement enabled, constrained or complemented by virtual connections and exchange? Conversely, how have the circulation of information and the construction of intangible ties been facilitated or thwarted by the physical movements of people and commodities? Both types of mobility have been the source of considerable concern and even fear on the part of urban governments and elites. The importance of controlling the physical movements of the poor has been evident in policy and planning, as well as in less formalized strategies of the better off. Sometimes the poor see their movements curtailed through restrictive housing, transport and policing systems, sometimes they are coerced into movement, as in the many instances of slum clearance and the forcible removal of informal vendors or beggars. Beyond the space of the city itself, national and regional border regimes aim to keep economic migrants out even as elite mobility is encouraged. In nineteenth-century Paris, Haussmannization involved a dramatic restructuring of the city based on rational, modern architecture and planning. The Parisian poor, who had proved prone to street barricades and revolts, were forcefully relocated from the city centre to the periphery, while boulevards were widened and straightened to enable military control over the potentially unruly masses.¹ Similarly, colonial planning sought to regulate the movement of the urban underclass through strict residential and labor segregation. More recently, the proliferation of gated communities and the militarization of urban space throughout the world results in what Harvey (2003: 940) terms 'ghettoization by default' (*cf.* Davis, 1990; 2006).

1 The extent to which the displacement of the urban poor under Haussmannization was a direct goal or a side-effect of real estate investments is subject to debate.

These forms of regulating physical movement were often accompanied, especially in the twentieth century, by attempts to control imaginative movements and to curtail the development of transnational communication and solidarity. While cosmopolitanism was an important factor in the class projects of urban elites and middle classes, the poor were not expected to develop aspirations or affiliations that were not local and parochial. The fear of international connections between the urban poor has been most evident in the case of communism. The possibilities that communism offered the urban proletariat to engage in physical and virtual exchange and solidarity instilled dread in the hearts of lawmakers and industrialists alike throughout much of the twentieth century. Similarly, early in the twenty-first century, the capacity of religious and particularly Islamic fundamentalism to connect and mobilize urban disenfranchised populations across the globe is considered an imminent danger by many governments and citizens. While the goals of communism and Islamism obviously extend to more drastic societal change than simply connecting impoverished urban populations, we argue that the potential for *global* mobilization enabled by such connections — the rapid spread of contentious politics across borders through class-based or religious internationalism — has been considered especially worrisome. Such fear of mobilization often translates into the increased regulation of physical movement. Under McCarthyism, citizens suspected of un-American activities were denied passports and their movements became subject to surveillance. In recent times, Islamist terrorist attacks are routinely followed by an (albeit temporary) intensification of security checks at immigration offices and airports.

Elites and middle classes, appreciating the importance of physical movement and imagined connections in mobilizing resources and people, have often considered both forms of mobility unsuitable for the poorer classes, or even a threat. Higher status is often associated with mobility or, as Virilio (2005) shows, with velocity. Urban poor as a rule have a larger degree of freedom in imaginative mobility than in physical mobility. The movement of images, songs and a sense of solidarity are less easily constrained by power holders than bodily movement. If people are unable to move their own bodies at high speed across vast territories, they try to be in control of at least the velocity of material objects or messages in order to solicit prestige (Castells *et al.*, 2006). Appadurai (2001) argues that those urban poor groups that can mediate the forces of globalization in ways beneficial to the poor while remaining rooted in the local context indicate new possibilities for urban governance and 'deep democracy'. By engaging in forms of activism that are simultaneously local and border-crossing, the urban poor can utilize global, horizontal networks to achieve physical and social changes in their direct environment. Such transnational exchanges can strengthen the position of poor urban communities within vertical partnerships with more powerful local and national actors. An in-depth exploration of the slow and fast flows that connect people globally and locally, then, contributes to a better understanding of their potential for political mobilization.

Representations of mobility and mobile representations

The ways in which physical movement, place and urban poverty are represented are critical in understanding how real and virtual mobilities intersect. Physical movement — practiced, experienced, embodied — gains its meaning through various representational strategies (Cresswell, 2006: 3–4). These representations are rarely neutral; in fact they are highly political and often contested. They can either incite the urban poor to move, or discourage them from doing so. Similarly, they can constrain or facilitate communication between the poor, whether within a city or across national borders. It is the political aspect of such representations and the potential for mobilization that we are particularly interested in exploring here.

As new developments in information communication technology allow these representations themselves to become increasingly mobile, the scope for mobilization broadens. The successful referencing of different scales that such mobile representations allow can function as a political tool for marginalized urban groups. In many cases, the

possibility of transnational virtual mobility — communication and exchange facilitated through cheap access to mass media, telephones and the internet — informs and stimulates local mobilizations of the urban poor. Analysts of the ‘digital divide’ argue that uneven access to new information communication technology reinforces existing inequalities. While the possibilities for virtual mobility to empower the urban poor should not be overestimated, the real world configurations of the digital divide are changing by the day, and the urban poor are incontestably already integrated into global communication networks. While these transnational networks do not have as much economic or political impact as those of globally connected elites, they are nonetheless important facts in the daily lives of many millions of impoverished city-dwellers.

The contrasts and connections between imaginative mobility and bodily movement are a central feature in all the contributions to this symposium. A number of the articles focus in particular on the politics of representation. Marianne Maeckelbergh, Eveline Dürr, Christien Klaufus and Rivke Jaffe all present cases that examine the class and cultural politics surrounding the mobility of images produced of and by the poor, in relation to the mobility of urban poor themselves. They focus on the stories of marginalized residents in racialized ghettos and barrios in the US, Latin America and the Caribbean. The difficulty of leaving these neighborhoods by choice forms the basis for the mobilization of images, people and resources. Through imaginative or virtual mobility, the urban poor engage in a symbolic struggle for recognition, often drawing on the new possibilities offered by ICT. In their efforts to overcome stigma and marginalization, they make creative use of cultural productions and the media. Resulting from these struggles is a sense of belonging, both to a physical territory and to a transnational imagined community, that can be regarded as a resource that the urban poor use to counter social stigma. Ultimately, these articles show the importance of representation in understanding the interconnectedness of physical and imaginative movement. Self-representation and the ability to determine individual movements through space are the real source of power in all these examples, making agency and empowerment central notions in all four articles.

Marianne Maeckelbergh (2012, this issue) addresses residents’ social struggle against displacement in a gentrification area in New York City’s East Harlem, focusing on the Movement for Justice in El Barrio. The movement’s first priority is to stay put in their neighborhood, making immobility their goal. Being recognized as the legitimate residents of El Barrio is the prerequisite for any further social mobility. Their struggle highlights the contested values of urban space — as a place to live or a real-estate asset — and the difficulties of claiming the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968; Harvey, 1973; 2003; Brown and Kristiansen, 2008). Maeckelbergh emphasizes the notion of self-determination, describing how the East Harlem social movement drew on a sense of belonging and mobilized the desire to ‘stay put’ in the face of neoliberal land speculation and gentrification. She stresses the interconnectedness between local and global scales, as the local political mobilizations in this New York neighborhood articulate with the transnational dissident voice of Urban Zapatismo. She convincingly demonstrates how transnationalism can facilitate political action, since ‘[t]he nature of citizenship is affected by eased affiliation with distant individuals, groups, or causes’ (Smart and Smart, 2003: 275).

Rivke Jaffe’s article (2012, this issue) gives another example of negotiating scales in her examination of the ghetto as a mobile imaginary. She explores the travels of ‘the ghetto’ as a notion disseminated in black popular culture that has become appropriated and reproduced by urban marginalized groups worldwide in ghetto music, literature, videos and fashion. In line with Sheller and Urry’s (2006: 213) call to study the ways in which people and places are situated in ‘the fast and slow lanes of social life’. Jaffe’s article shows how the urban poor who would seem to be located in the ‘slow lane’ of life in the city stir up citizenship claims in two ways. First, bodily movements, for example in dance, form an important focus of these cultural expressions, and they stand in contrast with residents’ social immobility and the impediments to travel or move out of their

neighborhood. Second, the ghetto dwellers use sonic and lyrical travel across borders to mobilize their claims transnationally. This allows the producers and consumers of 'ghetto culture' to construct symbolic spaces through 'bridges of sound', simultaneously stressing a sense of belonging to local soundscapes and streetscapes and to a transnational counterpublic. Jaffe explores the emergence of a sense of shared solidarity and even 'immobile subjectivities' through transnational music scenes. The commercial potential of this shared identity offers a limited number of artists the opportunity to travel and achieve social mobility. The most successful producers of these forms of popular culture, such as the Jamaican reggae musician Bob Marley or the Senegalese-American rapper Akon, achieve international fame and travel the globe on live tours. Yet for most ghetto dwellers, international physical mobility and local social mobility remain difficult to achieve.

Even more than in Jaffe's case, Christien Klaufus and Eveline Dürr demonstrate the importance of control over self-representation through transnational connections and its link to improved opportunities for physical and social mobilities at home. Klaufus (2012a, this issue) describes how the poor in marginalized neighborhoods in Ecuador use the appearance of their homes in an attempt to remove the stigma their neighborhoods suffer. Class-based narratives about the urban periphery brand these neighborhoods as uncivilized. While many of the Ecuadorian poor have sought to improve their lot through transnational migration, those who have remained use various material and symbolic strategies to improve their wellbeing. One such strategy, described in this article, includes the use of international references in architectural interventions to achieve higher levels of social prestige and wellbeing. Residents make their domestic space look 'decent' and attractive by copying prestigious architectural elements such as arched window frames and other international architectural examples. Klaufus argues that these home improvements should be understood as performances that rely on forms of symbolic mobility.

Dürr (2012, this issue) presents a contrasting case to that of Klaufus, discussing the new and controversial phenomenon of slum tourism. In Dürr's account, it is exactly the poverty and misery of the poor that is underscored, as their visibly impoverished houses are eagerly 'consumed' by outsiders. While recognizing that some tour operators sincerely wish to facilitate direct contact between people from the global North and South, she raises critical questions about the commodification of this vulnerable group of people and the unequal exchange that such cross-cultural and cross-class encounters entail. She analyzes the case of an organized tour to the garbage dump that is organized by a local church in the Mexican town of Mazatlán. While the images of the people working on the garbage dump travel around the world as the tourists go back home, the scavengers themselves remain largely immobile. She emphasizes, though, that some scavengers refuse to be part of the tour and have their homes visited, claiming their agency and controlling their representation by choosing to allow or refuse tourists' access. Ironically, the authenticity of the tour is premised on the visual poverty of the toured: improving the situation of the poor would be counterproductive for the income generated by the slum tourism. Slum tourism, then, can contribute to the immobilization of the people in the slums.

Differential mobilities and mobilizing difference

Another topic that appears in several contributions is the way in which mobility differences within or between social groups are (re)produced in local power constellations. Although the urban poor are understood as actors who are capable of mobilizing people and resources, they operate within existing social structures. Some contributions discuss how sociocultural restrictions, for example gender or ethnic inequalities, impact on mobility, while others show how these differences in mobility, in turn, shape power relations. For instance, in the case of US and Caribbean ghettos, described by Rivke Jaffe, physical immobility intersects with class and ethno-racial

hierarchies. Historically, forced residence in these marginalized areas resulted from social, economic and legal structures of exclusion (Wacquant, 2007). Yet over time, the difficulty of getting out of the ghetto and the stigma associated with these classed and racialized spaces has bolstered these same hierarchies.

Various authors have pointed out the links between lack of physical mobility and social exclusion (e.g. Ong and Blumenberg, 1998; Cass *et al.*, 2005; Hine, 2007). As the articles in this symposium also emphasize, the measure of (control over) physical movement individuals possess relates directly and indirectly to their socioeconomic opportunities. For instance, individuals' degree of physical mobility influences the level of dependence on others for the acquisition of livelihood necessities. The degree of virtual mobility, on the other hand, affects the extent to which shared experiences can produce a sense of solidarity or a collective identity, which can be mobilized to increase levels of autonomy.

Emma Jackson's account (2012, this issue) of the lives of homeless youth in London clearly exemplifies the power play over mobility in public space. The youngsters in her study demonstrate a high degree of mobility and in fact use mobility as a resource, but at the same time their movements are restricted by a number of actors in the urban arena. As circumstances and formal institutions repeatedly force the youngsters to move on, they are essentially fixed in the very process of moving, or, as Jackson succinctly puts it, fixed in mobility. Another way of looking at the mobility of the homeless youth in London is to distinguish between mobility as a resource, as a loss and as something that needs to be managed. In the narratives of the youths, these three aspects are not neatly separated. Mobility can be seen as a resource and a burden at the same time, as both a form of agency and a limiting structure. It is something to be regulated by official agencies including local boroughs and the police as well as by homeless youth themselves through peer and self-surveillance. The movements of the homeless in London are entangled with processes of place making and the production of spatialized meaning. Jackson argues that their movement is never totally free and always requires some moorings, whether a Day Centre or a bus route. London can thus look like a series of exclusive, bounded spaces, with homeless youth moving from a hostel, to a friend's place, to family, and on to another hostel, remaining fixed in mobility.

Sometimes restrictions to mobility result from a combination of benign but ill-considered interventions and pre-existing normative structures, as is evident in the article by Annemarie Samuels (2012, this issue), who conducted fieldwork in a housing project built by an international donor outside Banda Aceh, Indonesia, in order to provide accommodation to those who had lost their residence in the tsunami of December 2004. For women in particular, relocation to the isolated housing project has proved difficult, as previously existing gendered differences in mobility became more pronounced. Physical distance to the city centre and prohibitively high transportation costs combine with gender norms and financial interests to effectively immobilize many women, who remain inside the newly built community. The men who earn a living operating the public transportation connection to the city centre actively discourage the possibility of cheaper forms. In addition, gender norms regulate female use of motorcycles. For instance, women who ride a motorcycle are often targeted for controls by the sharia police who question their inappropriate dress. The simple fact of riding a motorcycle, in other words, of being mobile, is seen as implying other forms of inappropriate behavior. Meanwhile, *merantau* (a form of mobility roughly translatable as *Wanderlust*) is perceived as constitutive of Indonesian masculine identities and livelihoods branded as male. Physical mobility is also central to various 'male' livelihoods, such as riding a rickshaw, driving a bus, or vending fish door-to-door.

Like the homeless in London, the women near Banda Aceh acknowledge that (control over) physical mobility can be a resource, or a capability, when it increases their self-determination (Kronlid, 2008). Sometimes, mobility restrictions are self-imposed. Some women in Samuels' study make a conscious decision to stay at home, as permanent occupancy of the newly built dwellings will ultimately give them ownership

of the house. Partly self-imposed physical immobility enables the acquisition of real estate necessary to attain social mobility. Ironically, such self-imposed restrictions on mobility resemble those of enclave residents in gated communities (Caldeira, 2000; Low, 2004). In high-crime contexts, these wealthier residents' movement through urban space is often fraught with anxiety, in some cases resulting in the construction of so-called 'fortified networks' throughout the city (Rodgers, 2004).

Social distinctions and stratification — along lines of class, gender, ethnicity, age or permanence of tenure — both shape differences in mobility and are bolstered by them. Yet these differences and a shared experience of exclusion can be mobilized to counterbalance deprivation and inequality. Shared experiences of forced im/mobility and material deprivation can form the basis for political activism, as Maeckelbergh demonstrates, or transnational solidarity, in Jaffe's case, or can become, in Dürr's contribution, 'tourism potential' (cf. Urry, 2008: 151). In the cases described by Klaufus and Samuels, material deprivation is not emphasized but rather strategically hidden in attempts to claim full citizenship. Across the globe, the ability to accentuate a self-defined identity, or to conceal an ascribed one, can be considered a dynamic cultural mechanism and a livelihood resource for the urban poor.

Public-private divides

Sheller and Urry (2003) argue that contemporary mobilities have produced significant transformations in public and private life, and that we need to depart from an overly static or regional (and for our purposes, urban) conception of these terms. Such a rethinking is also relevant in the case of the urban poor, who use their own and other people's mobility to either reaffirm or contest the boundaries between public and private spaces and domains, boundaries that have often served to keep them in their place. The mobile behaviors that affect such ontological and spatial classifications are often informed by territory-related notions such as autonomy, safety, belonging and familiarity. In a context of urban poverty, the physical or imaginative place-making involved in public-private negotiations is both political and emotional.

The contributions in this symposium show how such spatial negotiations and place-making transcend the borders of the local or the urban. Dürr describes how some impoverished residents allow tourists to visit their homes and take photographs of their private spaces, perhaps not always realizing the public nature that these representations of their lives will take on through blogs and travelogues. The cultural producers described by Jaffe intentionally publicize the most intimate parts of their private lives by blending their globally-oriented tales of the ghetto with memories of the home, as in Jamaican dancehall artist Baby Cham's *Ghetto Story*: 'I remember those days when hell was my home / When me and mama's bed was a big peace of foam / and mi never like bathe and my hair never comb'.² Jaffe's account shows how experiences of urban marginalization in various ghettos around the world are combined rhetorically to stress social similarities. The counterpublic emerging through the circulation of these evocative ghetto texts (cf. Hirschkind, 2006) is transnational in scope.

Place-making by the poor often involves contesting the urban social order. The homeless youth described by Jackson attempt to create a sense of home and of privacy in public space, in streets, buses and day centres. They label certain environments as 'familiar', hence safe, and others as 'unfamiliar', meaning hostile or dangerous. In interactions with other homeless youth, they recreate territorial boundaries in London through differentiations in accent, slang and the reading of 'familiar' faces. In so doing they create their own intimate geographies, in which the public and the private are delineated in ways that may clash with mainstream definitions (cf. Mitchell, 2003: 135). In Klaufus' case study the urban poor, drawing inspiration from the practices of

2 Lyrics from 'Ghetto Story', by Dameon Dean Beckett and David Willard Anthony Kelly; © EMI Music Publishing, BMI Work #7996133.

transnational migrants, use the public parts of private space — the facade of their dwelling, the fence around their property, their patio — to make public statements about their personal way of life and aspirations. Anthropologists have pointed out how transformations of domestic space impact social conduct between neighbors (Pader, 1993; Miller 1994; Fletcher, 1999). Collectively, such aesthetic statements can change social norms. These examples show the complex intersections of mobility, privacy and publicity in the lives of the less powerful. Whereas mobile interventions into public–private divisions may be empowering for certain individuals, the effect of larger social transformations are hard to pinpoint and need to be studied over time.

Researching the urban poor: academic mobilities

Any discussion on the urban poor must also pay attention to the position of those researching them and the specific practices of mobility associated with this research. It would be problematic to discuss the mobility of the urban poor without reflecting on the ethics and politics of the ethnographers themselves (*cf.* Clifford, 1997). Urban anthropology has a history of such reflexive practice, with its roots in the debates on postcolonial anthropology and the call for an ‘anthropology at home’ that emerged in the 1970s (Hannerz, 1980; Smart and Smart, 2003: 267). The intensification of economic and cultural globalization towards the end of the twentieth century gave rise to new theories on travel and tourism (Urry, 1990; Gmelch, 2004) and new forms of anthropological practice such as multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995) and auto-ethnography (e.g. Ulysse, 2007). These developments prodded urban ethnographers to become more conscious of their own physical mobility and their roles in knowledge production and supra-local epistemic networks in relation to academic career making (hence their own social mobility).

The authors of the articles that follow are part of these networks and structures. While all are women, historically the less mobile sex, their positions within European academia mean they inhabit a different kind of mobility from many of their interlocutors. Jackson starts her article with a reflection on ‘the disparities between my own mobility as an aspiring academic (off to talk about the im/mobilities of others . . . at an international conference) and those of my research participants’. Like Jackson, Samuels sees the degree of control over physical mobility as an indication of empowerment, stressing the underprivileged position of women in her research community — the women that she as a relatively mobile female researcher was able to meet. Helping to circulate nuanced versions of the stories of the involuntarily mobile homeless of London and the involuntarily immobile women in Banda Aceh drives the voluntary mobility of these researchers.

In other articles the mobility of the ethnographers relates to their multiple roles in and outside the academy, which inform the various ways in which they mobilize the stories, ideas and histories of their informants. The basis of Jaffe’s article about ghetto popular culture, for example, lies in part in her involvement as a DJ in the black popular music scene. In her roles as ethnographer and DJ she amplifies the musicians’ messages both within and outside academia. In Maeckelbergh’s case, her engagement in political activism and her role in decision-making processes in what she calls ‘alterglobalization’, are intertwined with her research. The engaged form of anthropology she practices means that she both analyzes and partakes in transnational social justice movements.

Klaufus, trained in both anthropology and architecture, has described elsewhere how she became part of an international exchange of architectural design ideas, as her travels to Ecuador preceded several visits of young Ecuadorian architects to her hometown Amsterdam (Klaufus, 2012b: xiv). Their views on Dutch housing influenced her notions of house building just as her ethnography on Ecuadorian houses influenced theirs. Dürr’s ambiguous role as ethnographer/tourist will be recognizable for many readers. While she analyzes the phenomenon of slum tourism from an analytical distance, like many fieldworkers she can identify to a certain extent with the slum tourists and their search for

experiences ‘sensuously “other” to everyday routines and places’ (Urry, 2008: 155). This enables her to give a balanced account of the pros and cons of slumming. Overall, the contributions imply that anthropological introspection extends beyond the physical movement of ethnographers to their multiple involvements in the global flows of information and goods, whether at home or abroad. In this sense, new forms of mobility have not only influenced the lives of the urban poor but anthropological thinking and urban anthropology as a sub-discipline as well.

Conclusion: mobility, mobilizations and urban change

As the urbanization of the world continues apace, the numbers of the urban poor grow as well. National governments, NGOs and global governance institutions such as the United Nations all make major efforts to reduce slums, ghettos and urban despair. Despite the dire situation many of the urban poor suffer, in some aspects they are slightly better off than their rural peers, for example with regard to healthcare and education. The promise of improved material conditions is part of what continues to attract people to cities (Gilbert, 1994: 31; Satterthwaite, 2002: 19). Within cities, movements in and across urban space have been the subject of continuous debate. In the 1960s and 1970s critical urban theorists such as Henri Lefebvre, Manuel Castells and David Harvey attempted to unravel the ways in which cities become locations for commodification and capitalist processes (Brenner *et al.*, 2009: 177). A somewhat less influential contemporary school, with protagonists such as Herbert Gans, Gideon Sjoberg, Michel de Certeau and Ulf Hannerz, advanced a culturalist approach studying the processes of meaning making in urban space and the way urbanites behave in different urban contexts (Borer, 2006). These two contrasting approaches, one taking the urban political economy as a starting point and the other focusing on cultural meanings and urban ways of life, are bridged by the ‘mobility turn’ this symposium engages.

It is critical for urban studies to understand the role of im/mobility in both social stratification and processes of meaning making. The research scope presented by the authors in this symposium tracks the movement of people, ideas and goods through time and space and sketches how these mobilities can become assets for the largely immobile, and conversely, how immobility can be an asset for the forcibly displaced. The authors link these various forms of physical and symbolic mobilities and immobilities to the opportunities for the urban poor to mobilize both locally and across borders. Regardless of whether the focus of study is people or their cultural products (*cf.* Miller, 1998), the contextualized relationship between dynamic or motionless entities and urban territories ultimately defines the direction of social change in cities. To the urban poor, what matters most is not mobility or immobility *per se*, but rather the degree of autonomy in terms of both bodily movement and imaginative travel. It is this ultimate concern over the level of control over mobility that the six articles presented here have in common.

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Résumé

Les objectifs du symposium sur les mobilités et mobilisations des populations urbaines pauvres sont exposés dans ce texte introductif. S'intéressant aux déplacements physiques, sociaux et imaginés des pauvres, vers et à l'intérieur des villes, il examine comment ces flux s'inscrivent dans les dynamiques de la mobilisation sociale urbaine et témoigne de l'intégration du 'virage de la mobilité' dans les études de ces populations. Cette introduction propose plusieurs thèmes relevant de cette démarche, à commencer par un souci particulier des interconnexions entre les mouvements physiques et virtuels. Puis sont étudiées les représentations de la mobilité et les représentations mobiles, c'est-à-dire la façon dont un déplacement physique, un lieu et la pauvreté urbaine sont représentés, ainsi que la mobilité transnationale accrue de ces représentations. Tout un volet analyse comment les différences de mobilité dans ou entre les groupes sociaux sont (re)produites dans les constellations de pouvoir locales. De plus, le lien entre les mobilités et les frontières public-privé est examiné, notamment sous l'angle de la fabrication physique ou virtuelle de lieux. Pour finir, l'accent est mis sur la mobilité des chercheurs, les auteurs défendant un intérêt critique pour le positionnement de ceux qui étudient la population urbaine pauvre et les pratiques de mobilité spécifiques associées à ces recherches.